



**(U) Write Right: Is That Adjective or Adverb Really Necessary?**  
**(repost)**

FROM: [REDACTED]  
of the Reporting Board (S12A)  
Run Date: 12/16/2004

(U//FOUO) Those of you who have taken *RPTG3290: SIGINT Journalism Workshop* probably still have copies of the [Tight Writing unit](#). The governing principle can be summed up in this excerpt: "SIGINT reporters must approach their jobs with the same frame of mind as sign writers or telegram drafters, striving to get the message across immediately. Our products make up a small percentage of our customers' daily information deluge. If we want them to be read, we must immediately capture the readers' attention, hold their attention, and convey the message, i.e. the intelligence."

(U) The purpose of today's column is twofold: to urge writers both to be concise, and to examine their writing for unconscious clichés. Is that adverb really needed? In other words, is it necessary for the reader's understanding? For instance, was the effort "basically fruitless" or was it "fruitless"? What does "basically" add? Nothing. Basically nothing. "Fundamentally," "essentially," "basically," and "successfully" are some of the most-used superfluous adverbs in all writing today, not just reporting.

(U) We here needn't consider "major motion pictures" (does anyone make minor ones anymore?), but we could probably save a considerable amount of bandwidth if everyone who stuck in a "successfully" or "successful" stopped and thought about it. "Unsuccessful attempt" is one of the few appropriate uses, and that's in the negative. "The test was successfully completed" is no better than "the test was completed"; if you want to convey something about the test RESULTS, you need a different term. "The test was completed without delay, with satisfactory results," for instance. (We have had a computer programmer argue for "the system successfully failed over," but we dismissed that as sophistry...or perhaps jargon.)

(U) We hope all our readers had a Happy and Successful Thanksgiving!

---

(U) *This article first appeared on December 1st.*

---

**"(U//FOUO) SIDtoday articles may not be republished or reposted outside NSANet without the consent of S0121 ([DL sid comms](#))."**

---